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AUTHOR Petherbridge, D. L.
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ABSTRACT

Every language teacher is automatically a teacher of culture. The language teacher is an instructor of culture in the same way that an instructor of history or anthropology teaches those disciplines. To prepare for teaching the culture, the training of language teachers should include pre-service and in-service activities and materials specifically related to the culture, in addition to the learning of the language itself. Cross-cultural training for language teachers might also be helpful. The inclusion of such activities and materials suggests that the current four-year teacher training program will require some adjustment in both time and required content to provide the necessary background. These changes also suggest the need for closer cooperation between teacher trainers and those in other disciplines. One major question about the "how" of instruction concerns the extent of the use of the mother tongue. In general, one could apply the principle that the more knowledge of the target language the students have, the more they can benefit from instruction in the language. As far as the "when" of teaching culture is concerned, teachers should be aware that they are teaching culture at all stages. (SW)

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THE LANGUAGE TEACHER AS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CULTURE

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D. L. Petherbridge

The University of Lethbridge

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Every language teacher is, willy-nilly, a teacher of culture. We no longer debate the place of language as an important part of culture, and the chief means for its transmission. In fulfilling the function of teaching the culture, is the teacher, or should the teacher be, a "sample, specimen, typical embodiment or analogue of" the culture, or is he, or should he be, an "agent, delegate or substitute"?[1] That is my interpretation of the title given to this workshop.

There are other questions, however, which may help in reaching some reasonable answers to the question. The most obvious of these seems to me to be: Of what culture is the teacher to be a typical embodiment or substitute? For any of the most commonly taught languages, at least, there is no <u>one</u> culture that the language represents. Let us take English as an example, that being my mother tongue, and therefore the language with which I am most familiar. Should the teacher of English in some way represent British culture, U.S. culture, or Canadian culture, not to mention other areas of the former "far-flung British Empire"? For the sake of argument, let us say that he is to represent British culture. Then we must ask which of the sub-cultures he is to represent, for example the "Dinner at eight" or "Dinner at noon"? To further illustrate possible distinctions, may I remind you of the Englishman who, waxing patriotic in a public address proclaimed, "I was born an Englishman, I have lived an Englishman, and I hope to die an Englishman." To which came the response, in a loud Scottish voice, "Ha'e ye no ambeetion mon?"

If the teacher is to be a "typical embodiment" of the culture, we face other practical problems. How can we obtain a sufficient number of native speakers to teach French, for example, in Alberta? I recall some years ago asking a friend at Laval if he could suggest a likely candidate to teach French in Lethbridge. His reply was that he couldn't think of anybody who would want to emigrate. The same point could probably be made for most languages taught. Even if we could obtain native speakers, how long would it be before their original knowledge of the culture became modified by the culture of their new milieu, or became out of date? To exemplify in the extreme, we have in Alberta, speakers of the languages most commonly taught in the province, French, German and Ukrainian, who are teaching their mother tongue. Yet, they were born in Alberta. How representative of the culture of their language are such speakers?

If the teacher is to be a "substitute", we could adopt the principle that a period of living in the culture of the language taught be an essential part of his preparation, a system common in Europe. Simple geography suggests that this is not a practical solution in Canada where, in the same distance it takes to drive from Calgary to Vancouver, in Europe one could have crossed four or five linguistic and cultural boundaries. Even if it were possible, how long a period of residence would be essential? If you will forgive a personal example, I have spent a not inconsiderable amount of time studying the culture of Québec. I can make an honest claim that I have travelled more miles visiting various parts of the province than many, if not most Québécois, but to be a representative of the culture of Québec, Je regrette. ʃəpa capa:bl. In short, I would argue that it is unlikely that the language teacher can be, or, if he is, can remain, a "typical embodiment" or "substitute" for the typical embodiment of the culture.

Nevertheless, I agree with Weiss who argues that unless a real and current culture is taught, the study of a language (German in this case) will remain an "irrelevant exercise."[2] Referring to student response he continues:

> They find their ethnocentric suspicions confirmed that among all odd foreigners the Germans occupy a particularly quaint niche in the Museum of Cultural Absurdities and that one need not pay any more attention to them than to the proverbial mad German professor on TV, or to the pigheaded Schultz of "Hogan's Heroes" fame.[3]

Lewald provides a not exhaustive list of the difficulties involved in establishing a programme "involving the interaction of culture and language."[4] They include questions like: how much anthropological knowledge is to be required of a language instructor, where the instructor is to obtain such knowledge, does a partial knowledge of a foreign culture distort reality, and at what level should instruction begin.[5]

In partial response to such questions we may consider some other discipline which is at least comparable. In history, for example, we surely expect students to have a knowledge and understanding of much of what we would include in the cultural content of a language course. It would be highly impractical, however, to expect a specialist in Mediaeval French History to be a mediaeval Frenchman or to have lived in mediaeval France. We expect him to know his subject and present it "objectively, dispassionately and accurately."[6] Weiss uses these terms to emphasize the argument that the language teacher is not a cultural apologist. Morain is even more emphatic on this score when she writes:

> Nor is it the duty of a language teacher to become a propagandist for the country whose language he teaches. His purpose is to impart understandings, insights, and awareness, not to create cultural converts.[7]

The same article, though written from the point of view of "teaching for cross-cultural understanding in a pluralistic society," deals also with the kinds of information required by the teacher, as well as methods tried in various places, and describes also some materials available to assist the teacher in carrying out his responsibilities for the teaching of culture. The references listed contain much of value to the language teacher, as do the references in another important review by Seelye.[8]

Let us take the point of view that the teacher is unlikely to be a representative of the culture in either of the senses discussed earlier, but rather that he is an instructor in the culture in the same sense as an instructor in history or anthropology instructs in his discipline. Then we must continue our thinking in terms of what shall be taught, how it shall be taught and when. It seems that most of us involved in teaching a language are agreed that <u>something</u> will be taught because of the intimate relationship of language and culture, whatever other reasons may be propounded for <u>why</u> culture should be taught.

Of the many definitions of culture which help to determine the "what", may I offer the following for its brevity, its all-inclusive nature, and its literary ring: "the individual's role in the unending kaleidoscope of life situations of every kind and the rules and models for attitude and conduct in them ...."[9] Such a broad definition implies an equally broad, and deep, knowledge of the culture. If the teacher has such a knowledge he might embark on a program such as Weiss outlines.[10] He begins with readily

understood current material, such as a comparison of advertising catalogues, compares residences, studies geographic information of various kinds and develops to concepts of social behaviour and friendship, relatively abstract ideas.

Evidently, to prepare for such a programme some pre-service and in-service activities specifically related to a specific culture, in addition to the learning of the language itself, will need to be added to the current preparation of language teachers. In reference to the place of kinesics in the classroom, Green calls for "an undergraduate culture course quite unlike the one presently available to language majors."[11] Such a course, however, still leaves the problem of how to remain current in the knowledge of the culture. Earlier in the same article Green suggests the need for current inventories of gestures to be "incorporated into materials of instruction."[12] The extension of this idea to include all aspects of culture seems appropriate. Materials of this nature are beginning to find their way onto the market. They include a variety of media, both print and non-print. The insistence of language teachers on the use of such materials will assist in ensuring their continued development.

To make the teacher more sensitive to the cultural information presented even in current materials of instruction some cross-cultural training might be helpful.[13] The inclusion of such activities, and perhaps others just as appropriate, suggests that the current four-year programme of preparation for other language teachers will need some adjustment in both time and required content in order to provide the background that will enable the teacher to know how much there remains for him still to learn in order to teach his subject adequately. It suggests also the need for closer

cooperation among anthropologists, geographers, historians, psychologists and sociologists and those traditionally engaged in the pre-service preparation of teachers. Only thus could there be developed academically respectable courses particularly appropriate for the future other language teacher.

The "how" and the "when" of teaching culture I intend to deal with only briefly, because I believe that what is to be taught must first be established. A process for instruction seems rather pointless without a firm knowledge first of what information is to be taught and what outcomes are expected as a result of the student's learning that information.

One major question in how instruction is to be given is, "To what extent will the mother tongue be used?" While we may differ in some details, it seems to me that in general one could apply the following principle: The more knowledge of the language the student has, the more he can benefit from instruction in that language. At the beginning, he can be taught, for example, formal greetings to replace the "Hi" that one hears frequently in schools nowadays. Perhaps some brief explanation in mother tongue might be necessary at this stage. By contrast a fourth-year university course entitled "Civilisation de Québec", should properly be given in French. The best known journals in the field abound with descriptions of and proposals for techniques for the learning of cultural information at various levels. It seems appropriate that they too might be included, as suggestions at least, in materials of instruction.

Some indication of when culture should be taught has already been given. Perhaps the verb "should" is inaccurately used. Culture <u>is</u> taught, from the first lesson. It continues as students learn distinctions like

"tu" and "vous", "du" and "Sie", and as they extend their knowledge of various everyday situations and to the literature of the language. The teacher's awareness of the fact that he is teaching culture in all stages is important, so that his teaching may be as complete as possible and as accurate as possible.

In conclusion, I argue that it is unlikely that the other language teacher can be or can remain a representative of the culture in any true sense. It is therefore important that the pre-service preparation of the teacher include activities that will give him specific cultural knowledge to teach, and that materials of instruction include current, accurate information to enable him to maintain his knowledge.

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